

# I Call It a Miracle

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With one wild blow, an employee of a shipyard subcontractor knocked out power to a ship and the adjacent pier for an hour and 45 minutes. Workers also had to replace more than 400 feet of damaged power cable. The only good thing that came from this incident is the worker didn't die from his mistake—a miracle, considering he cut a 440-volt cable with a sharp metal pole.

The worker had been routing cables when he came upon a stuffing tube that lacked enough space to hold the extra cable. In most cases, you'd just remove the packing material used to hold the cables in place, pass the new cable through, and replace the stuffing tube. That solution wouldn't work this time, though.

To make the situation worse, the worker was on his first full day on the job, and his supervisor hadn't provided the necessary tools or supervision. His supervisor told him to dig out the packing material with a wooden dowel to make room for the new cabling. Then he walked away, leaving the new guy with no idea where to find a wooden dowel. The new guy solved his dilemma by grabbing a broom in the space and using its handle to do the job.

The problem was that it was taking too long. It was then the worker decided to use the sharp metal pole that ultimately led to his near tragedy. He used the pole to dig out the rest of the stuffing tube. However, there still wasn't enough room for the new cable, so he again grabbed the metal pole. After several aggressive blows, the 440-volt cable separated, creating an electrical arc that traveled about 6 inches up the pole before it grounded on the edge of the cableway support. The cut cable tripped several breakers.

The worker can be thankful the metal pole grounded out on the cableway support because he wasn't wearing rubber gloves. It's also fairly safe to assume his hands were at least a little moist.

Life aboard ship is fraught with dangers to people and equipment. Some are obvious and easily

avoided, others aren't. An important lesson learned here is that unfamiliar dangers exist aboard a ship in overhaul, and everyone must pay special attention to detail to avoid mishaps. The combination of airborne contaminants, hot-work, open tanks and voids, tagged-out alarms, and civilians unfamiliar with shipboard hazards calls for increased awareness. We can't afford to assume a miracle will save us. ☹

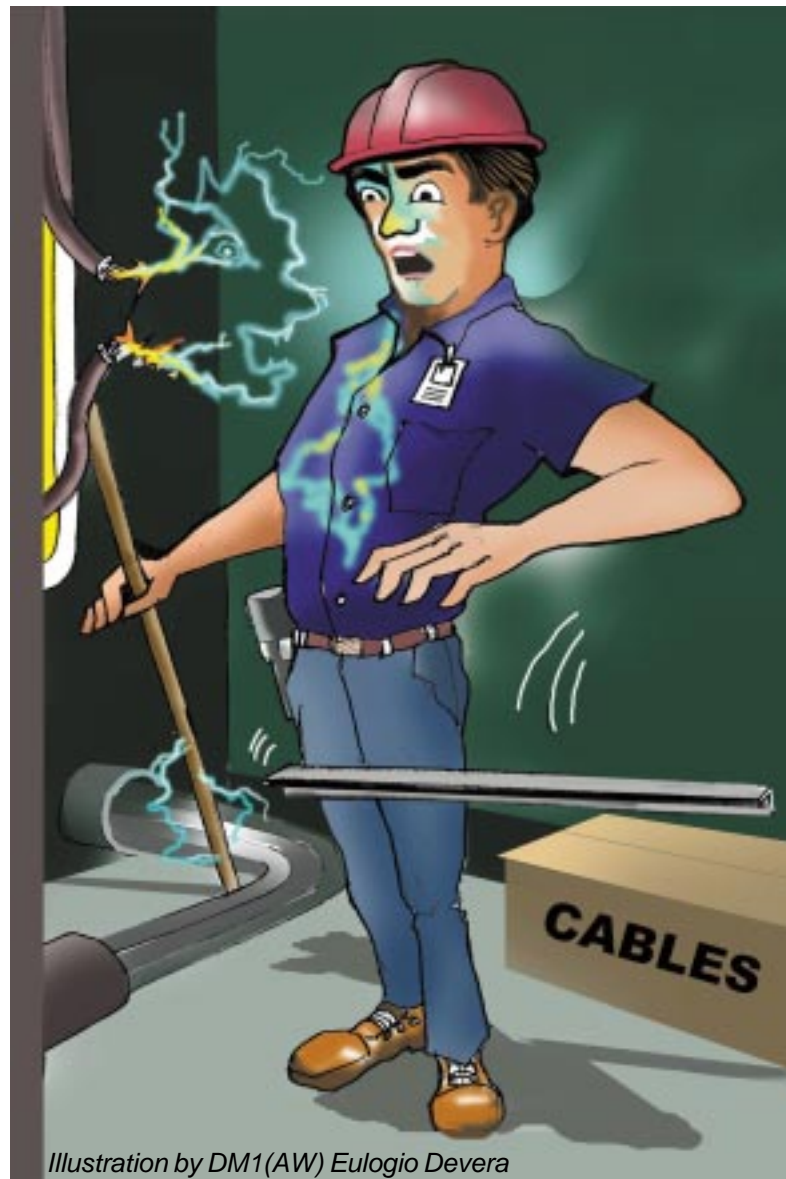


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